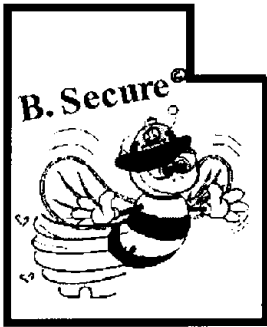


SUICIDE AND ITS IMPACT IN THE WORKPLACE

by Robert V. Hanna, Ph.D.



Hello busy bees, I thought you might want a break so I asked our friends at Blomquist Hale Consulting Group, Inc. to write an article on Suicide in the Workplace. They agreed and Dr. Robert Hanna prepared this article. Hope you find it as interesting as I did.

Words cannot describe the grief John's death caused his family. The ramifications will continue to ripple for many years, having changed our lives forever. The loss of John, by his own hand, left an angry, ugly hole in our lives. It has torn apart family members and friends. Suicide is such a senseless act. Did he really think any of us would be better off without him? Did he think HE would be better off? I'll never know the answers to these nor any of the other questions I've asked myself since John's death.

Wife & Survivor of Suicide

Rumors abound in the office. Management has made no official announcement but most employees know John committed suicide. No one is sure what happened. Some people may be in a fog, experiencing shock and disbelief. Others seem unable to stop crying. While still others are ruminating about the past, overwhelmed with guilt for not taking John's repeated depressive episodes more seriously. Few are comfortable discussing it.

The scenario above typifies the impact suicide can have on the workplace. It is estimated that 4.5 million people in the U.S. have been intimately affected by suicide with 186,000 more people each year. This is the consequence of the 30,000 suicides that occur each year in the U.S.. Given these statistics there is a strong likelihood that your workplace has been or will be affected by suicide. Those left behind to grieve a suicide are appropriately known as "survivors of suicide." Survivors of suicide are relatives, friends and co-workers. To be a survivor means you are experiencing significant distress because of a suicide.

It is difficult for anyone to deal with the loss of a loved one. Typical bereavement includes feelings of painful longing for the deceased person, anxiety when thoughts of the deceased are remembered, crying, difficulty concentrating, and sleep disturbances. For those confronted with a loss by means of suicide, the bereavement process can be particularly severe and potentially pathological.

Survivors of suicide commonly report feelings of bewilderment, shock, disbelief, sadness, guilt and anger over the death. They experience episodes of crying, depression, persistent anxiety, and at times suicidal ideation. Some suicide survivors report experiencing disturbing and frightening images of death. The survivors struggle long after the suicide. They feel responsible for the suicide. They feel betrayed by the person for not finding other means to deal with their pain.

The emotional and mental aftermath of losing someone to suicide can be likened to dealing with the flu. There are know escaping the ill effects of the flu. All one can do is address each miserable symptom as it comes along. Likewise, the bereavement process is also unavoidable and, in fact, necessary for returning to normal functioning. There are things, however, that one can do to facilitate and mange the symptoms of the grieving process mentioned above.

First, SUPPORT is essential. The survivor of suicide, overwhelmed with emotion and thoughts, needs others who can listen as she/he works toward making sense of the inner turmoil. And for support to be truly helpful, the survivor must share his or her thoughts and feelings (even if it doesn't make sense). The bereavement process can include crying uncontrollably one moment to laughing at a fond memory the next to feeling angry at the person for choosing suicide. No feelings are wrong but are part of a complicated grief process that makes many stronger once completed.

Given the intensity and complications survivors of suicide experience, professional intervention is highly recommended. Many State departments have access to employee assistance programs (EAP) who are well-suited to handle this type of crisis. An EAP can offer immediate intervention in the workplace with counseling services. EAPs differ in range of services with many EAPs offering assessment and referral services to Blomquist-Hale Consulting Group EAP who offers high quality, and solution focused counseling with no set number of sessions.

The EAP attempts to intervene as soon after the suicide as possible to assist all employees. The EAP counselor is invaluable in creating an environment where people can move beyond societies stigma regarding suicide and talk genuinely about their feelings, thoughts and concerns. The EAP counselors' expertise, objectivity, and support are often difficult to find with ones' friends and family. An individual appointment can be scheduled with the EAP for you or your family to develop a personalized plan for facing the grief. The EAP also has access to community resources such as support groups or organizations who specialize in helping those dealing with a suicide.

In summary, suicide is an unfortunate part of our present society. No one chooses to be a survivor of suicide. The unexpected and often senseless nature of a suicide is intense and usually overwhelming. If you, a co-worker, or your work site is dealing with the impact of suicide then seeking professional assistance, such as your EAP, is highly recommended. The EAP can give suicide survivors' empathy, support, understanding, guidance and suggestions that are essential in working through their bereavement period.

Until next month remember Be smart, Be safe, and B. Secure.